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THE PALM OIL INDUSTRY'S CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY IN THE EMERGING MARKET

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Abstract

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The sustainability of the palm oil industry is a complex and controversial issue due to the environmental and social impacts it causes. This can lead to the loss of wildlife habitats and disrupt natural ecosystems. This research aims to analyze the corporate social responsibility (CSR) management strategies of palm oil in Indonesia to address these issues. The research method used is thematic analysis, by collecting and analyzing data from various sources related to CSR and the sustainability of the palm oil industry. The analysis results show that the company's commitment to having a good working relationship with the local community is the most significant strategy. In addition, increasing environmental awareness and high community demand can be seen as opportunities for companies to implement palm oil CSR management strategies. The internalization policy of CSR in operational standards and the company's commitment to implementing CSR in the palm oil sector need to be further enhanced for CSR management in palm oil in Indonesia. In addition to collaboration with local communities, partnerships between companies, the government, and other organizations, as well as maintaining transparency in the implementation of CSR programs, are also strategies for holistic palm oil CSR management in Indonesia that can generate long-term benefits for all parties.

Keywords: Strategy, Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainability, Palm Oil, Community Empowerment

Authors' individual contribution: Conceptualization — M.D.W., S.S., E., and B.I.P.; Methodology — M.D.W., M.H.B.A.S., U.A., and M.J.; Investigation — M.D.W., S.S., E., and B.I.P.; Resources — S.S. and E.; Writing — M.D.W.; Supervision — M.D.W.; Funding Acquisition — M.D.W., S.S., and E.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Research on the palm oil business has seen a rise in scholarly interest in corporate social responsibility

(CSR) (Prasetyo & Nani, 2021; Wedayanti & Pulungan, 2023). The palm oil business in Indonesia has grown to be a significant economic sector (Kodir et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2019; Maluin et al., 2020). The palm

oil sector makes a substantial contribution to Indonesia's environment and economy (Wedayanti, Pulungan, et al., 2022). The Directorate General of Plantations reports that 2021 saw the largest gain in palm oil exports in the previous five years, reaching US\$27.6 billion, or 58.79% more than the year before (Yuslaini et al., 2023, p. 2). Thus, one of Indonesia's primary exports is palm oil. Plantations grow palm oil, a vegetable oil that is used as a raw ingredient for a variety of products, such as food, cosmetics, and biodiesel fuel (Yuslaini et al., 2023). However, because of its effects on the environment and society, the sustainability of the palm oil business is a complicated and contentious topic (Wedayanti et al., 2023). Deforestation frequently results from the growth of oil palm plantations, particularly in tropical forests that are rich in biodiversity (Austin et al., 2017; Paterson & Lima, 2018). Natural ecosystems may be disturbed, and wildlife habitat may be lost as a result (Laurance et al., 2014). Restoring forests and safeguarding ecologically significant places are two examples of the policies and initiatives that support environmental conservation and are necessary to preserve sustainability (Naidu & Moorthy, 2021; Watson et al., 2018).

Furthermore, soil erosion and water pollution are frequent outcomes of deforestation to provide space for oil palm farms. Implementing sustainable land management techniques is crucial. These practices include effective fertilizer use, proper waste management, and the use of suitable technologies to lessen soil erosion (Monteiro de Carvalho et al., 2015).

A business strategy known as CSR incorporates economic, social, and environmental factors into a company's activities (Karwowski & Raulinajtyś-Grzybek, 2021). Nowadays, CSR is viewed as a means of promoting sustainable development. There is more opportunity to address global economic, social, and environmental concerns by creating and implementing successful CSR programs because palm oil corporations are now more active than ever (Moyeen, 2018).

CSR has the potential to be a significant factor in preserving the sustainability of Indonesia's palm oil sector. The palm oil business has a big effect on the environment. Businesses must implement CSR strategies that prioritize environmental preservation if they want to remain sustainable (Sorsa & Fougère, 2021). For instance, businesses can fund initiatives to restore forests, preserving biodiversity and water quality. Using more ecologically friendly technology in the production of palm oil is another way that CSR can be used (Phochanikorn & Tan, 2019). In this instance, the government must have a well-defined and quantifiable plan of laws and policies pertaining to the palm oil sector, including those pertaining to land use, biodiversity conservation, the adoption of green technologies, social responsibility, and an industry that complies with sustainability standards (Pacheco et al., 2020).

Research analyzing the concept of CSR has been widely found. Previous studies mostly discussed CSR in general or in the context of other industries, but have not thoroughly examined CSR management strategies specifically for the palm oil industry in Indonesia, especially in Riau Province. Existing literature tends to focus on environmental or economic impacts but lacks discussion on

the integration of social, environmental, and policy aspects in palm oil CSR strategies. Research trends indicate an increase in publications about palm oil CSR, but thematic and bibliometric analyses (as conducted in this study) are still rarely used to map the evolution of this topic. Therefore, there is still a need to identify specific and simultaneous research results related to this topic with issues of CSR management strategies for the sustainability of the palm oil industry in Indonesia, particularly in Riau Province.

By examining the CSR management strategy used by Indonesia's palm oil business, this study seeks to close the gap created by earlier studies. Using this method, documents with information on connected subjects were examined. The following is an explanation of the research questions.

RQ1: What are the patterns and developments in the study of corporate social responsibility management techniques used by Indonesia's palm oil sector?

RQ2: What corporate social responsibility management techniques does Indonesia's palm oil business employ?

RQ3: How do corporate social responsibility initiatives in Indonesia contribute to the sustainability of the palm oil sector?

The structure of the research is as follows. Section 1 reviews the urgency of the importance of research, research phenomena. Section 2 discusses the relevant literature. Section 3 analyzes the methodology that has been used to conduct empirical research on CSR management strategies in the palm oil industry in Indonesia. Section 4 reviews the research findings, research trends, CSR management strategies in the palm oil industry, and the challenges and obstacles that must be addressed. Section 5 summarizes the research conclusions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Figure 1's literature study identifies and examines prior research concerns pertaining to CSR environmental management from 2019 to 2014. The number of prior studies that address CSR management solutions is still quite small. The analysis in this study is still supported by some literature, nevertheless. First, improving society and the environment surrounding the business is one of CSR's primary goals. Businesses can enhance social circumstances, promote sustainable economic growth, and protect the environment by implementing CSR programs and initiatives (Bardos et al., 2020; Novitasari & Tarigan, 2022). Second, the majority of Indonesia's palm oil production comes from Kalimantan and Sumatra (Afriyanti et al., 2016; Wedayanti, Pulungan, et al., 2022). Third, the government has a significant role to play in overseeing and controlling investments in the palm oil sector to make sure they support sustainable growth and serve the interests of the environment and local populations (Puppim de Oliveira & Jabbour, 2015; Tey et al., 2021; Wedayanti & Pulungan, 2023).

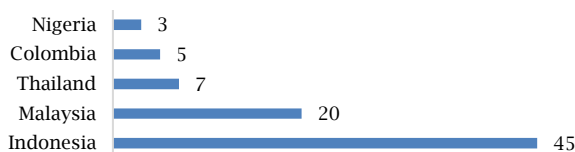
Figure 1 shows how to use Biblioshiny (Wordcloud) to find and analyze pertinent research and associated sources from 2019 to 2014.

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graph LR; A[Data collection (Ncapture)] --> B[Coding data (Nvivo 12 Plus)]; B --> C[Identify themes]; B --> D[Cases and attribute classifications]; B --> E[Theme mapping (project map tool)]; C --> F[Data analysis]; D --> F; E --> F;
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This pattern suggests that during this time, there was a greater interest in and emphasis on the palm oil CSR strategy. The growing quantity of published papers indicates that academics are becoming more interested in and concerned with palm oil CSR strategy. An overview of the evolution of palm oil CSR strategy research from year to year is given by this analysis. It gives insight into why researchers are interested in studying this subject. This can be used as a starting point for future research development and as a basis for selecting study areas that need more investigation. Deeper comprehension, the ability to identify trends and developments, and the provision of a foundation for policy and practice is just a few advantages of a high trend in the quantity of published papers (Wedayanti et al., 2024; Wedayanti, Nurmandi, et al., 2022).

The number of documents based on researcher affiliation is included in addition to the number based on publication year. Figure 4 explains the quantity of documents according to country affiliation.

Figure 4. Number of publications by association with a country

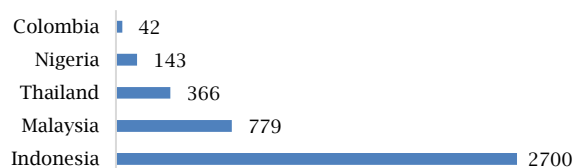


Source: Scopus database, 2024.

Research on palm oil CSR strategy demonstrates considerable disparities in the quantity of public papers associated with national affiliation. With 45 published papers, Indonesia demonstrates a high interest in researching CSR strategy for palm oil. This nation comes in first, which suggests that affiliated researchers are quite interested in it because Indonesia produces about 59% of the world's palm oil (Mering, 2024). The study reflects a cross-national effort to address the challenges of palm oil CSR strategies and promote socially responsible business practices. Malaysia comes in second place with 20 published documents, indicating that the country also makes a significant contribution to this research, as Malaysia accounts for 39% of global palm oil production. Thailand comes in third place with seven published documents, followed by Colombia and Nigeria with five and three published documents, respectively, indicating that there is not much research in this area.

The number of papers based on researcher affiliations sourced from Sinta that are relevant to the palm oil CSR study is in addition to the number of documents based on the Scopus database. Figure 5 explains how many documents from Google Scholar were categorized by nation affiliations:

Figure 5. Number of papers published by the nation of affiliation



Source: Google Scholar database, 2024.

Based on data from the Google Scholar database, research on palm oil CSR reveals notable variations in the quantity of published documents pertaining to nation affiliation. With 2700 published documents, Indonesia demonstrates a significant dedication to researching CSR in palm oil. The fact that this nation comes ranked first indicates that affiliated researchers are particularly interested in this issue, making it crucial to look more closely at what approaches are best for Indonesia in terms of palm oil CSR. With 779 published documents, Malaysia comes in second, showing that it contributes significantly to this study as well. Thailand ranks third with 366 published documents. Furthermore, a strong CSR management plan is crucial in the palm oil industry, as evidenced by the 143 and 42 documents released from Nigeria and Colombia, respectively.

According to the data, the nation with the most published documents about CSR for palm oil is Indonesia. Indonesia has a huge amount of potential to contribute in this area. Given its wealth of natural resources and environmental variety, Indonesia faces many obstacles in its efforts to implement a CSR strategy for palm oil. Deforestation, habitat loss, rising global temperatures, and threats to biodiversity are just a few of the risks this nation faces (Wedayanti, Nurmandi, et al., 2022). Thus, studies on CSR strategy for palm oil can help comprehend and resolve these issues in Indonesia. Furthermore, Indonesia has implemented sustainable business practices and taken a number of actions to reduce these risks. Policies for the development of renewable energy, sustainable forest management, and initiatives to protect marine areas with high biodiversity are a few examples. By offering a more thorough comprehension of palm oil CSR strategy that can be applied in Indonesia, research can aid in these initiatives.

4.2. Indonesia's palm oil industry's corporate social responsibility management approach

A planned and quantifiable analysis is required to build a program that is exactly on target because CSR is intimately tied to the firm's reputation, and the dynamics of the palm oil plantation industry have a significant impact on the social activities of the local community where the company operates. The four guiding principles of good corporate governance (GCG), fairness, transparency, accountability, and responsibility, must be harmoniously integrated to form CSR (Sesario et al., 2025).

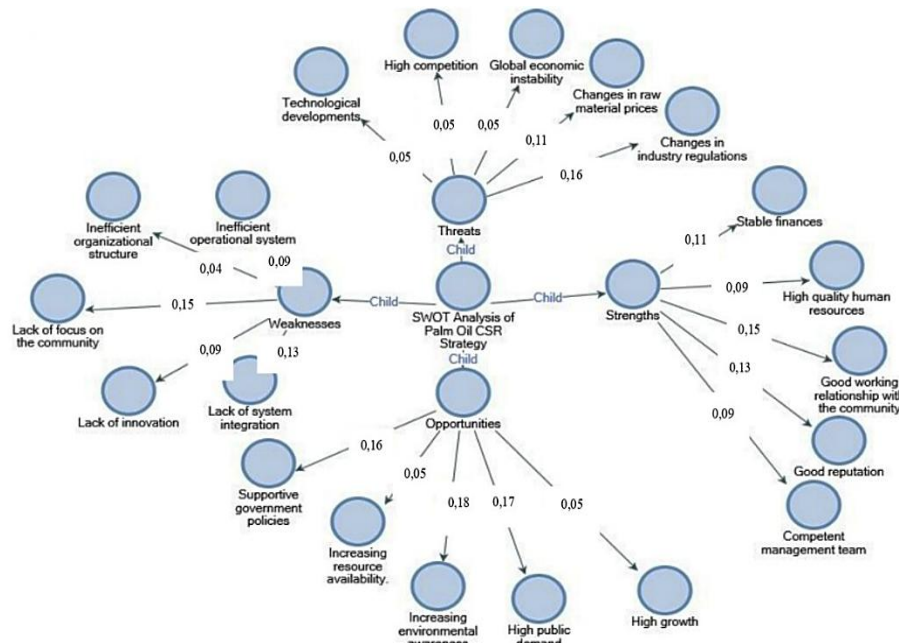
Finding the correct approach in the analysis process will make it easier to create a strategy or study a problem, particularly in the plantation business sector (Wedayanti et al., 2024). It will be simpler for us to resolve our issues if we employ suitable strategic planning and problem-solving techniques, particularly in the CSR sector, which requires significant attention from management, governance, and policymakers (Atik et al., 2020).

Stronger regulations, an integrated plantation licensing service system, expanded market access, Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) certification, attracting foreign investment, industrial downstreaming, rejuvenation programs, plantation revitalization programs, and sustainable plantation partnerships are some of the significant factors taken into account. A biogas power plant based on waste from palm oil is also presently being developed by the government (Wedayanti & Pulungan, 2023).

The Indonesian government is thinking about a number of services and strategies to help with the CSR management of palm oil. Figure 6 shows

the mapping of the palm oil industry's CSR management strategy.

Figure 6. Researchers processed the CSR strategy management SWOT analysis for palm oil



Source: Authors' elaboration using NVivo 12 Plus, 2024.

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis of Indonesia's CSR palm oil management techniques yielded some intriguing results. The most important tactic to become a CSR palm oil management strategy in Indonesia, according to the company's strength indicator, is having positive working relationships with local people (0.15). Among the various shortcomings in the CSR palm oil strategy that must be taken into account, the lack of community focus (0.15) is the most significant. Additionally, there may be chances to apply CSR palm oil management techniques due to rising consumer demand (0.17) and growing environmental consciousness (0.18). The implementation of CSR palm oil management techniques in Indonesia is threatened by changes in raw materials and industrial laws. The same is true of the data in Figure 6. Businesses can use the following strategy:

- *Included in the strengths-opportunities (S-O) strategy's implementation* are: improving collaboration in community-based activity management and response to requests based on environmental and community needs, and enhancing people's garden businesses through MSMEs and cooperatives, as well as expanding collaboration in the realm of education.

- *Included in the weakness-opportunity (W-O) strategy's implementation* are: by means of plantation managers, an integrated system for plantation operations and specialized daily technical implementers is being created. As well as holding frequent agenda meetings for community-based initiatives and hiring specialized personnel in the CSR industry.

- *Included in the strengths-threats (S-T) strategy's implementation* are: growing technical innovation in the plantation industry, combined with governmental regulatory reforms. Maintaining fresh fruit bunches

(FFB) and land productivity is also necessary to ensure their continued good production.

- *Included in the weakness-threats (W-T) strategy's implementation* are: develop strong ties with the government, the villages, and subdistricts in which the business operates, and carry out CSR initiatives that are pertinent to the community's needs.

Empowerment through CSR initiatives should be grounded on genuine needs that are discussed in dialogue with the government, businesses, communities/non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academics, and researchers. Additionally, recognizing a community's local knowledge, values, beliefs, skills, procedures, and resources is a key component of empowerment. It is far more important and directly beneficial to the community to adopt existing local wisdom by letting the community manage their land in their own way and giving them maximum access to their production sources, which include water, land, agricultural land, capital, technology, distribution channels, and other supporting infrastructure (Sesario et al., 2025)

When creating a CSR program, the five phases listed below might serve as guidance (Sesario et al., 2025):

1. *Engagement.* The first step in building positive relationships and communication with the community. This phase may also take the shape of educating people about the development plan for the CSR program. Building understanding, acceptance, and trust in the community that CSR will be aimed at is the primary goal of this step. A 'social contract' between the community, the business, and the persons involved can be established using social capital as a foundation.

2. *Evaluation.* Finding issues and community needs will serve as the foundation for developing programs. This phase can be executed using both a needs-based strategy (community goals) and

a rights-based strategy (international agreements or normative norms of social rights in the community).

3. *Action plan.* Create a plan of action. On the one hand, the program should consider the goals of the corporation, including shareholders, and on the other, the community's (stakeholders') objectives.

4. *Facilitation and action.* Putting mutually agreed-upon programs into action. Local organizations or the community can independently implement programs. However, businesses and NGOs can also help with these. Assistance, oversight, and monitoring are essential for a program's successful execution.

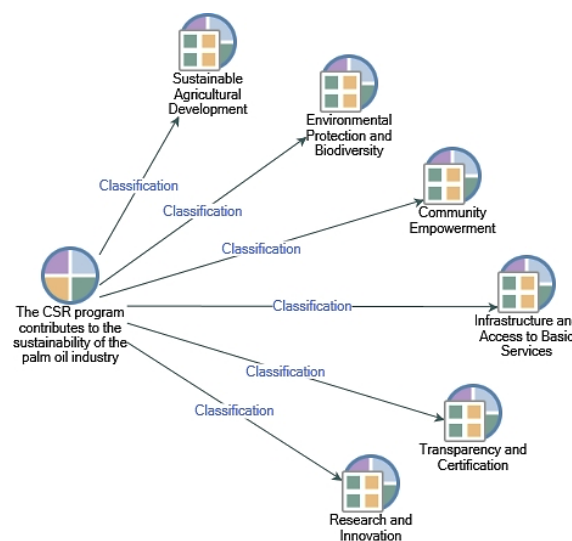
5. *Assessment and reformation or termination.* Evaluate how successful the CSR program is in the industry. There must be some sort of contract termination and departure strategy amongst the parties concerned if the evaluation results indicate that the program will be canceled. For instance, putting CSR training of trainers (ToT) into practice by

enhancing the community's (stakeholders') capacity to carry on the CSR program on their own. It is vital to develop lessons learnt for the next CSR program if it turns out that the current one will be extended (reformed). As long as it's required, new agreements can be created.

4.3. Sustainability of the palm oil sector: Indonesia's corporate social responsibility initiatives' role

The effects of the palm oil business on the environment and local residents in production areas have made it a contentious issue (Wedayanti et al., 2023). CSR initiatives can play a big role in preserving the palm oil industry's sustainability. These CSR initiatives support the long-term viability of Indonesia's palm oil sector.

Figure 7. Numerous CSR initiatives that support Indonesia's palm oil industry's sustainability



Source: Authors' elaboration using NVivo 12 Plus, 2024.

Numerous Indonesian palm oil firms have started initiatives to help local populations grow their plantations or sustainable agriculture. This can involve teaching farmers how to manage water resources effectively, use organic fertilizers, and engage in ecologically friendly farming methods. The preservation of the natural environment surrounding their farms is another priority for palm oil producers. Programs for land rehabilitation, reforestation, biodiversity monitoring, and water resource conservation may all be part of this. We can also concentrate on empowering the communities surrounding palm oil plants through CSR initiatives. To help local communities become more skilled, support small and medium-sized businesses, and enhance their quality of life, businesses can offer education and training (Cornelius et al., 2008; Septiyarini et al., 2022).

Companies that produce palm oil can help build the local infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and access to utilities like electricity and clean water. This will lessen socioeconomic disparity and enhance local communities' quality of life (Raimo et al., 2021; Septiyarini et al., 2022). Companies that produce palm oil can increase operational openness and commit to achieving sustainable certification, such that offered by the RSPO. This accreditation demonstrates that

businesses adhere to accepted sustainability norms, which include economic, social, and environmental guidelines. One international project that is crucial to preserving the sustainability of the palm oil sector is the RSPO. Promoting the production and consumption of sustainable palm oil that considers social, environmental, and economic factors is its aim (Johnson, 2022; Tey et al., 2021).

Companies that produce palm oil can also help build the roads, bridges, and other infrastructure that surrounds them, as well as provide access to utilities like electricity and clean water. This will lessen socioeconomic disparity and enhance local communities' quality of life. In the context of sustainability concerns, infrastructure and the availability of necessary services are of utmost importance. Communities' quality of life is considerably enhanced by adequate infrastructure and access to basic amenities, including energy, clean water, sanitary facilities, and transportation. The attainment of sustainable development goals is also aided by adequate access and infrastructure (Dai & Menhas, 2020). Governments, the commercial sector, and other interested parties must make investments in environmentally friendly infrastructure and guarantee that everyone has fair and equal access to basic services.

Companies that produce palm oil have also set aside funds for research and development of the newest methods and technology in the sector. For instance, creating more fruitful types of palm oil, using fewer chemical fertilizers and pesticides, or creating more effective processing techniques. Local communities and other stakeholders must actively participate in the implementation of these CSR initiatives. By reducing its adverse effects and offering more extensive environmental and social advantages, the palm oil sector can thereby progress toward higher sustainability.

The sustainability of the palm oil industry has been maintained in large part by initiatives like sustainable agricultural development, biodiversity and environmental protection, community empowerment, infrastructure and access to basic services, certification and transparency, and research and innovation. The detrimental effects of the palm oil business on the environment and local communities are lessened with the support of sustainable agricultural development. By educating farmers about organic fertilizers and ecologically friendly farming methods, the program boosts production efficiency and lessens reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides. This lessens pollution in the environment and preserves the ecosystem's equilibrium.

To preserve the natural resources around oil palm plantations, biodiversity and the ecosystem must be protected. Programs for water resource conservation, reforestation, and land rehabilitation aid in preserving wildlife habitats, preventing deforestation, and preserving healthy ecosystems. As a result, it preserves biodiversity and helps stop major environmental losses. To keep the palm oil industry sustainable, community empowerment is essential. The economic and social empowerment of local communities is achieved through initiatives including education, skill development, and the support of small and medium-sized businesses. This enhances the community's quality of life, lessens socioeconomic gaps, and increases their participation in decisions pertaining to the palm oil sector.

Access to necessary services and infrastructure is vital to the palm oil industry's long-term viability. Better connectivity and more effective trade are made possible by the construction of sufficient infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and access to clean water and energy. This enhances local communities' quality of life, creates economic possibilities, and lessens regional inequities. For the palm oil sector to be sustainable, accreditation and transparency are essential measures. The palm oil sector can reassure customers that its products adhere to strict sustainability criteria by enhancing operational openness and earning RSPO accreditation. This encourages the commerce in sustainable palm oil and helps to establish confidence.

The development of fresh and improved answers to the problems confronting the palm oil sector depends heavily on research and innovation. The industry can create new technologies and procedures that are more effective and ecologically friendly by investing in research and development. For instance, creating more fruitful palm oil cultivars or more effective processing techniques

might lessen their negative effects on the environment and boost industrial output. All things considered, these initiatives help the palm oil sector remain sustainable by lowering adverse environmental effects, enhancing community involvement, raising living standards, guaranteeing openness and adherence to sustainability guidelines, and promoting innovation for better and more effective methods.

5. CONCLUSION

Indonesia is one of the largest producers of palm oil in the world, with significant contributions to the national economy. However, this industry also faces major challenges related to environmental and social impacts, such as deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and conflicts with local communities. Through the implementation of CSR and commitment to sustainability principles, the palm oil industry in Indonesia is working to reduce these negative impacts while promoting more responsible business practices. CSR programs have become a key instrument in balancing economic, social, and environmental interests. Some key contributions include: 1) community empowerment, 2) environmental protection, 3) infrastructure development, and 4) technological innovation. Multi-stakeholder collaboration becomes an important strategy in the success of CSR. The success of CSR cannot be achieved without cooperation between companies, the government, local communities, and NGOs. Although progress has been made, several challenges still hinder the optimization of CSR, such as implementation gaps, global competitiveness, and impact measurement.

Research on the strategy of managing CSR in the palm oil industry in Indonesia is important and has long-term significance because Indonesia is the world's largest producer of palm oil (59% of global supply), thus its sustainability practices affect the international market and global environmental issues. Pressure from the European Union (EU) and global consumer demands sustainable certification, RSPO/Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO/ISPO), making this research a basis to meet those standards. This research fills an academic gap by focusing on specific CSR strategies in palm oil in Indonesia, particularly in Riau Province, which has not been extensively studied before. The thematic and bibliometric analysis (through NVivo 12 Plus and Biblioshiny) provides an innovative methodological approach to mapping research trends. The limitations of this research analysis rely on documents from Scopus and Google Scholar (2015–2024), which may overlook important studies that are not indexed or recent publications after 2024. The study is centered on the context of Indonesia (particularly Riau), so the findings may not fully apply to other palm oil-producing countries with different socio-economic dynamics. Therefore, the recommendations for further research are to measure the impact of CSR programs through socio-economic indicators, compare CSR strategies in Indonesia with Malaysia or Colombia to identify best practices, or investigate the consistency of CSR implementation and its inhibiting factors over a period of 5–10 years.

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